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THE
CHARACTER AND CONDUCT
OF THE
FEMALE SEX,

AND
THE ADVANTAGES
TO BE DERIVED BY
YOUNG MEN
FROM THE SOCIETY OF
VIRTUOUS WOMEN.

A DISCOURSE,
IN THREE PARTS,
DELIVERED IN MONKWELL-STREET CHAPEL,

JANUARY 1, 1776,

By JAMES FORDYCE, D.D.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Address was selected from a set of Discourses intended chiefly for the improvement of Young Men, and now preparing for the press with all convenient speed. As it was, on a review, thought equally to concern Young Women, the greater part of it was also offered to their consideration, upon the First day of the New year. What was then delivered has since received large additions, which have drawn it out to such a length, that, for the relief of the reader, it is divided into Three Parts. From the attention with which it was heard by a very numerous and respectable auditory, and from the wishes which many have expressed for its publication, the Author is willing to hope it may do some good.

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DISCOURSE
ON
THE CHARACTER, &c.

PART I.

JOHN, xi. 5.

NOW JESUS LOVED MARTHA, AND HER
SISTER—

FROM this amiable circumstance in the history of our Saviour, told with a simplicity inimitably tender, as well as from other beautiful passages connected with it, we know, not only that he often visited those worthy persons, but that his elevated soul took peculiar pleasure in their company. An example of such high authority will afford me a very fair occasion for contemplating the intellectual, moral,

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and spiritual intercourse, which ought to subsist between the sexes, as far as the condition of human nature will allow. A subject, you must acknowledge, of sufficient moment to merit some regard.

In the prosecution of it, I will first enquire into the Character and Conduct of the Female Sex, who have not, I apprehend, been always treated with the charity or the justice to which they are entitled; and then point out, as briefly as possible, the benefit to be derived by Young Men from the Society of Virtuous Women.

I should be happy, if I were able, to promote at once the edification and delight of every individual in this assembly: but to hope it, were equal presumption and ignorance. I have no expectation of gratifying the gay libertine, the gloomy bigot, or the angry critic, if any such are present; unless it be by supplying each with ample matter of remark in his own way. And be assured, that they who are much

inclined to censure, are but indifferently disposed to profit. What is now to be delivered will have little regularity of plan, and less connexion with system; as it will deviate considerably from the usual forms of religious discourse, and descend into particulars seldom introduced into the pulpit: on which account, I doubt not, it will be loudly reprobated by numbers. But, certainly, we need not be very solicitous about the opinions of the many, if we have the prospect of doing good to a few. A few at least will hear me with attention and candour: and indeed, if by convincing the understandings, and impressing the hearts, of ever so small a proportion of Young Men, or Young Women, I may, with God's assistance, contribute to the improvement and welfare of either, I shall, as long as I live, reflect on it with satisfaction, and call the first day of this new year blessed.

Among the innumerable ties by which mankind are drawn and held together, may

be fairly reckoned that love of praise, which perhaps is the earliest passion of human beings. It is wonderful, how soon children begin to look out for notice, and for consequence. To attract mutual regards by mutual services, is one chief aim, and one important operation, of a principle, which I should be sorry to think that any of you had outlived. No sooner do the social affections unfold themselves, than youth appear ambitious to deserve the approbation of those around them. Their desires of this kind are more lively, as their dispositions are more ingenuous. Of those boys who discover the greatest ardour to obtain, by their capacity, their spirit, or their generosity, the esteem of their companions, it may be commonly observed, that they shoot up into the most valuable characters,

Eagerness for the admiration of school-fellows and others, without distinction of sexes, is felt at first: but when, in process of time, the bosom becomes sensible to that distinction, it begins to beat

with a peculiar anxiety to please the female part of your acquaintance. The smiles, the applause, the attachment of Young Women, you now consider as conferring felicity of a more interesting nature; and to secure such happiness, is from henceforth an object that incites and influences you on a thousand occasions. By an increasing susceptibility to the attractions of the softer sex, you are carried more and more into their company; and there, my brothers, your hearts and manners, your tastes and pursuits, receive very often a direction that remains ever after, and that will probably decide your destiny through the whole of your existence.

I am aware, indeed, that to under-rate their importance, and cultivate their commerce only as subservient to convenience, amusement, or voluptuousness, is common among the ignorant, the petulant, and the profligate of our sex: but, happy as I have been in the conversation of many worthy and accomplished persons of the other, I would

willingly, if possible, prevent your adopting a system alike ungenerous and false.

It is certain, that savages, and those who are but little removed from their condition, have seldom behaved to women with much respect or tenderness. On the other hand, it is known, that in civilized nations they have ever been objects of both; that, in the most heroic states of antiquity, their judgement was often honoured as the standard, and their suffrages often sought as the reward, of merit: and though in those states the allurements of feminine softness was perhaps not always sufficiently understood, owing probably to that passion for public interests, and extensive fame, which seems to have overpowered all other emotions; it must yet be acknowledged, that the Ladies of ancient days frequently possessed a wonderful influence in what concerned the political welfare, and private affections, of the people to whom they belonged. But say, my friends, does it not reflect

some lustre on the fair sex, that their talents and virtues have still been most revered in periods of the greatest renown? And tell me, I beseech you, what age or country, distinguished in the annals of fame, has not received a part of that distinction from the numbers of women, whom it produced, conspicuous for their virtues and their talents? Look at this, in which you live: does it not derive a very considerable share of its reputation from the female pens, that eminently adorn it? Look into the history of the world at large: do not you find, that the female sex have, in a variety of ways, contributed largely to many of its most important events? Look into the great machine of society, as it moves before you: do not you perceive, that they are still among its principal springs? Do not their characters and manners deeply affect the passions of men, the interests of education, and those domestic scenes, where so much of life is past, and with which its happiness or misery is so intimately blended? Consult

your own experience, and confess, whether you are not touched by almost every thing they do, or say, or look; confess, whether their very foibles, and follies, do not often interest, and sometimes please you?

There cannot, I am persuaded, be many worse symptoms of degeneracy, in an enlightened age, than a growing indifference about the regards of reputable women, and a fashionable propensity to lessen the sex in general. Where this is the case, the decencies of life, the softnesses of love, the sweets of friendship, the nameless tender charities that pervade and unite the most virtuous form of cultivated society, are not likely to be held in high estimation: and when these fall into contempt, what is there left to polish, humanize, or delight mankind?

I am willing, indeed, to believe, that when thoughtless youths presume to laugh at women, it is not so much from any wicked incentive, as from an aim to display

the powers of wit and ridicule, in imitation of those professed libertines, who having, among certain classes, acquired a name in that way, are ambitiously copied by such as court the same kind of praise. With what pity have I sometimes listened to the low jests and miserable criticisms of striplings, on this subject; while they fancied, that, by adopting the style of their seniors in satire and licentiousness, they exhibited proofs of amazing proficiency in acuteness of remark, and knowledge of the world! But how has my compassion, both for them and their masters, been mingled with scorn, when I have seen both assume, in female company, the most respectful air, and the most complaisant behaviour; when I have heard them, on the entrance of an agreeable woman, break forth into the language of compliment and rapture, the moment after they had been loading the sex with abuse and derision!

The truth is, that neither the most frivolous, nor the most violent, declaimers

against women can endure the thought of being neglected even by the meanest of them. The passion for importance is so strangely insatiable and inconsistent, as often to seek its gratification from the very persons, whom those it actuates pretend at other times to treat with disdain.

Suppose, Gentlemen, you were told that a woman had been speaking of you in the same unmerciful manner, in which multitudes of our sex pronounce upon hers; would you not complain of the sentence, and appeal from her tribunal? Most probably. But suppose, that on meeting any of you, immediately after, she should alter her style, assume a language diametrically opposite, and express the highest approbation in the smoothest tones and with the softest airs of female blandishment; would not so arrant a coquet deserve your abhorrence? Undoubtedly. And yet,——shall I speak out?——I am by no means certain, that those of your number, who most affect to despise the

sex, would not be enchanted with the soothings of this very woman, more especially were she handsome. The credulity of loose men in similar circumstances, their boasting of the favours they have received, or would be thought to have received, and their exhibition of letters, presents, and gewgaws, from women who flatter their vanity to make sure of their purses, are sufficiently ridiculous. May we not add, that for those men to believe so implicitly in the sincerity of such artful creatures, where they themselves are the objects of their art, at the same instant in which they exult over them among their fellows, for giving credit to male adulation, demonstrates a weakness superlatively contemptible?

It proceeds, no doubt, in a great measure, from the mean opinion they entertain of female perception; in which, we will venture to say, they are often exceedingly mistaken. Where men are in question, it appears to me, that women not bewitched

by passion, or not biaſſed by prejudice, are for the moſt part much deeper judges, than is generally ſuppoſed. Of this I am certain, that the leaſt deſerving of them take a pleaſure in deriding to one another, and to their favourites, thoſe fools of our ſex, who at once calumniate and court theirs; while the worthy and the dignified frequently hear the ſmooth ſpeeches, and plauſible profeſſions, made to them by numbers of men, juſt as they hear the paſſing winds, with perfect indifference, though they are not always at the pains to expreſs it.

Among the abſurdities of human pride, it is one of the greateſt, that people under its influence are almoſt for ever deceived, themſelves, by the very methods which, with the full eſt confidence of ſucceſs, they employ to deceive others. Giddy girls, and inſignificant women, may be caught by the trite, unmeaning compliments of ignorant, or of diſſolute men: but ſuch men betray the narrowneſs of their views,

no less than the vileness of their hearts, when they conclude, that they can impose alike on all females, as if none of them had understanding to despise nonsense, or virtue to detest licentiousness.

Having said this, shall I confess, my fair friends, that I have been not a little mortified, when I have observed some of you, whom I presumed to possess more spirit and sentiment, apparently delighted with the extravagant praises of those male parasites and impostors, knowing their characters, and in your most serious convictions disdaining them? Trust me, Ladies, you forget at such times what you owe to yourselves, as well as to the opinion of men of sense and honour, from whose attachment only you can derive real satisfaction. It is fit you should be told, that the undistinguishing approbation, if not seeming preference, you too often bestow upon the worst enemies of your sex, is as hurtful to your future establishment, as to your present

appearance. I have known women of considerable merit, who have remained unconnected, and become forlorn, for no other reason but because they had given secret disgust to delicacy and discernment, by the allurements which they scattered, without discrimination or choice, amongst all the men of their acquaintance.

I just now mentioned the worst enemies of your sex. When they who have been accustomed to prey on beauty amongst individuals, scoff at virtue in all the rest, as nothing better than hypocrisy or affectation ; is there not reason to apprehend, they would, in this manner, fain lessen to their own minds the guilt of their past conduct, and by throwing down, as far as in them lies, the barriers of female reputation, remove one great obstruction to their future depredations?

It is possible, indeed, that a man may, by long commerce with the worst part of the sex, become so depraved in his notions, as to disbelieve the existence of morals in

the best. His infidelity on this article will be confirmed, if it has been his fortune to converse with courts, where luxury and duplicity are the mode, where truth and purity are rarely practised, and never known to be the means of preferment. The same inclination to question even the possibility of virtue in women will be too readily felt by such as, after losing their own at home, have visited countries from whence it is banished by universal levity and libertinism, while the established religion of those countries is only calculated to lead superficial thinkers into a contempt for better principles, and to relax, rather than strengthen, the obligations of duty. It is thus, I conceive, that we are chiefly to account for the opinions of a late celebrated writer, and many other men of the same stamp, in reference to the female character.

But need I remind those who now hear me, that equity, that reason, that common sense forbids us to take our estimate of the species from the most corrupt, or least

significant, of them who compose it? Even self-love should teach us to judge as favourably as possible of our kind. To be connected with a race universally worthless, is, methinks, not a very flattering idea. To be born of mothers without virtue, or of suspicious virtue, can surely confer neither honour nor delight. Would not one imagine, that honest pride alone should prompt us to adopt different sentiments?

It is, you will allow, not very easy to comprehend the preposterous and gloomy, might I not have said the horrid and malignant, pleasure, which many take in fancying those bosoms to be hardened with avarice, blackened with falsehood, or embruted with sensuality, which, unless the contrary appears, should be supposed the chaste abodes of honour, veracity, and generous affection. What a turn of mind must that be, which is fond of figuring the darkest passions, the foulest demons, to lurk there where happier feelings and milder thoughts are disposed

to behold the Virtues and the Graces disporting, like so many beautiful and benevolent angels.

Were there, in truth, no other reason for avoiding all intercourse with worthless women, would it not be quite sufficient, that from such connexions men are too generally tempted to suspect the principles of the virtuous? Tell us, ye votaries of Vice, ye who paint her with the smiling aspect of Pleasure, possessed of unrivalled attractions, surrounded with inexhaustible stores of delight, tell us, we conjure you, what she has to offer, as a proper compensation for the absence of that ineffable charm which attends the image of female innocence and sweetness? But we appeal to more competent judges; to such as have tried both sides, made the comparison, and fixed their choice for the better part. Let them decide, Whether, next to the joy arising from a consciousness of Virtue in their own breasts, there be any equal to the contemplation of her fairest forms in

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the behaviour of others ; of those women in particular, from whose powers to please, to captivate, in nameless irresistible ways, she derives an additional loveliness.

Have any of you, my young auditors, worn away, by a course of riot, your sensibility to the enchantment you formerly found in such company? I pity you from my soul. I say not merely, that you have lost one of the finest perceptions of the mind : I go farther, and aver, that you are estranged from the most elegant enjoyments of the heart, from its tenderest wishes, its softest anxieties, its sweetest hopes. The superior endearments of female friendship, the triumphant sense of possessing the affection of an intelligent and worthy woman, you, Sir, you are condemned never to know. Go, thou wretched man, and try if thou canst fill up their place by the mercenary caresses of prostitutes, and the applauses of unattached, unfeeling, hollow-hearted libertines. But I turn from so sad a survey to those happy youths who have hitherto escaped such contaminating influence.

As it is probable, that most of you will, after the confinement of the school, of the college, of an apprenticeship, or of whatever other early study, pass much of your time in the company of women, it deeply imports you to consider, with what sort of women you should associate. The infinite mischiefs attendant on communication with those miserable females, who have forfeited their honour, I will not now attempt to relate. At present I will take it for granted, that the sons of Reason should converse only with the daughters of Virtue.

Of these last the number is greater than many of you have been told ; much greater than bad men, who judge from bad samples, will ever be persuaded to believe ; and even greater than would be readily expected by the candid and virtuous themselves, were they to take their estimate from the general appearance of women in public life, instead of those private scenes where show and noise are excluded, where

the flutter of fashion is forgotten in the silent discharge of domestic duties, and where females of real value are more solicitous to be amiable and accomplished, than alluring and admired.

Little, indeed, do those women consult either their own interest, or the reputation of their sex, who enter eagerly into the bustle of the mode, obtrude themselves on the gaze of the glittering throng, and sacrifice the decent reserves, and intellectual attainments, by which men of sentiment and delicacy are most taken, to the passion for dress, and visiting, and splendor, and prattling, and cards, and assemblies, and masquerades without end. The coxcombs of the age may be caught by such arts of display, as much as those can be so who are generally captivated with themselves. They, no doubt, will be flattered with what they suppose to be an offering presented at their shrine, a price paid for their admiration. But, depend upon it, my sisters, those men who are formed to be agreeable companions,

faithful friends, and good husbands, will not be very forward to chuse their associates and partners for life, from the flaunting train of Vanity, or the insipid circles of Dissipation. Nor will it always be very easy to convince them, that while the open theatre of the world exhibits so many trivial and insipid characters of the female sex, its more retired situations abound with women of discretion and significance.

For my own share, I will confess that I should not have thought so favourably in general concerning the fair part of the creation, as I now think, had I formed my opinions on their subject in places of gay resort; where simplicity, softness, a sedate carriage, and rational conversation, must usually give way to the boasted tone, and brilliant but illusive figure of the society in vogue, which seems to me a composition of frivolous talk, fantastic manners, expensive outsize, servile imitation of the mode, incessant amusement, ruinous gaming, and eternal disguise. May I venture farther, and

acknowledge my astonishment, when I have discovered that some sensible and deserving women, who in the country delighted all that came near them, by a style and deportment perfectly reasonable and highly engaging, yet appeared to forget themselves the moment they plunged in the diversions and tumults of the town. Their heads turned round in the whirl of a fashionable life ; and their hearts, which went forth to their friends in the quiet of retreat, shrunk and vanished out of sight in scenes, where they apprehended that sentiment, affection, confidence, would probably be objects of derision. So then, Ladies, you could resign those sweetest pleasures of the soul, for the reputation of appearing modish : you could bury your better feelings, and relinquish, for weeks and for months, your more respectable pursuits, to mix familiarly and habitually with the herd of inferior beings, that run mad after superficial amusements, and the poorest objects of low-souled ambition.

Do we mean, that you ought to shut yourselves up from all the resorts of what is called Genteel Company, which, to say the truth, is often but another name for well-dressed triflers? We do not mean, we do not wish it. There are situations and connexions which would render it improper. To minds capable of reflection, the pageant, as it passes in review, may occasion many observations on the emptiness and perturbation of all but piety, worth, and heart-felt enjoyment. Nor is it altogether impossible, that a more correct appearance, a more composed address, friendly hints dropped by accident, improving remarks suggested by good sense, without the affectation of unseasonable gravity, may sometimes leave useful impressions, where they were least expected. We only complain, that the friends of Virtue should ever be so far intangled in the maze of modern impertinence, as to be afraid of living principally to themselves, to one another, and to the noblest purposes of their being.

Such, indeed, is the free system of manners in these days, as to render it difficult for a woman living in the world to keep that line of wise reserve, which leads most directly to female dignity and happiness. The customs of different countries and ages are known to have produced very different ideas on this point, as on a multitude of others. The opinion of him who affirmed, that a female's truest praise was her not being talked of at all, might be relished in ancient Greece, where the married women were in a manner secluded from society, being mostly confined to the interior apartments of their houses, and wholly engrossed by domestic occupations. According to our apprehensions, it is hard to conceive how a practice in appearance so uncourteous to the ladies, as well as unanimating to the men, could obtain amongst a people highly polished and uncommonly awake. Perhaps they judged, that the summit of female glory lay in breeding and training children for the commonwealth ; for that

commonwealth, which was the great commanding object of their affection and zeal ; so that, however a female here and there might be permitted to shine in the lights of science, and to charm by the powers of conversation, the studies necessary to this kind of eminence were considered, in general, as not very compatible with the tender cares, and arduous attentions, of wives and mothers, devoted to the prosperity of the state ; nor were women remarkable for those acquisitions usually regarded as distinguished by their virtue.

In Rome matters were conducted with, what many of the sex would esteem, a more flattering indulgence : they were not only admitted to convivial intercourse with the men, but to public festivals, theatrical entertainments, and even military games ; where young virgins appeared openly with a freedom of attire, an exposition of beauty, and a boldness of manner, but ill consistent with the just standard of female decency and attraction ; though by these means

they would, no doubt, acquire uncommon vigour and resolution, become more strongly interested in the achievements and honours of a warlike race, and be qualified in due time for giving birth to conquerors and heroes.

Even in Greece, where the wives were subjected to severe restraints, the maidens, not excepting the daughters of the principal citizens, were accustomed to be seen in processions, dances, and gymnastic exercises, which, if not very improving to their virtue, would however contribute to strength of constitution, and gracefulness of demeanour, while they gave sufficient opportunity of studying to please the eyes of the male spectators.

The fair sex in those days being, on many occasions, respected as the judges and rewarders of manly enterprises and magnanimous deeds, would naturally kindle, in the youth of their country, an emulation and ardour peculiarly conducive to

the exalted flights of spirit and patriotism that marked the purest ages of antiquity.

When from those illustrious people we turn our eyes to the Eastern regions, what do we see but swarms of effeminate and voluptuous men, who are either tyrants or slaves ; and of ignorant, idle, luxurious women, whose highest destination is to gratify the intemperate desires, or humour the proud caprices, of their masters ; a set of wretches as arbitrary as they are sensual, and whose jealousy and insolence join with their want of taste and refinement to treat those poor imprisoned females, as merely subservient to their passions ? Humanity and Virtue are afflicted at the view.

In some of the Western nations we are presented with a very different scene. It is the infirmity of our nature, to be almost always in extremes. In France the Women are supreme : they govern all from the court down to the cottage ; and from their influence the men, at least in the

more early periods of life, seem to derive their whole system of sentiments, inclinations, and manners. Can it be thought surprising, if the conceit and volatility of the former, continually nourished and flattered, should, in a climate which gives animal spirits light as air, infect the latter with a vanity, a giddiness, and an effeminacy, that characterize their youth to a proverb? But then, if I mistake not, it must happen in such a country, that when knowledge, good sense, observation, and sedate years take place, men will be found much the more courteous and amiable, as well as entertaining and accomplished, for their constant intercourse with a sex whom they are taught from the beginning to treat with attention and respect; a sex whose society in general, wherever it is cultivated with a proper regard for decorum and elegance, cannot fail to soften the temper, enliven the genius, and give an agreeable polish to the whole deportment.

That it is not more cultivated on such a footing in this country, has been often regretted by persons who despised very heartily the unmanly levity and loquacious nonsense of French coxcombs. Here the sexes meet with a greater or less degree of frequency and freedom; but for what purposes chiefly? Shall I be forgiven, if I tell the truth?---Why; to eat, and talk of eating, of the weather, or of the news; to visit, and practise forms; to play at cards, describe the fashions, and remark on the diversions of the season, or rather, for the most part, to repeat what they have heard others say about them; to partake in those diversions as often as they can; but both in public and private to amuse themselves more than one another; to gratify the love of dress, and display the pride of opulence. In the mean while, what barrenness of sentiment, what want of taste, vivacity, reflexion! How little interchange of minds, or reciprocation of those winning regards on the part of the men, and interesting manners on that of the

women, which give the communion between the sexes its greatest beauty and allurements !

Considering the fund of solid sense, and original humour, which has long distinguished the writers of this nation ; considering the valuable improvements in the philosophy of the human mind, in several branches of science, in composition, style, taste, and the fine arts, which have been visibly advancing for a course of years ; is it not somewhat strange, that the conversation of the upper classes, and of those individuals in the middle ranks who have been favoured by their education, does not in general take a better tincture, and exhibit a richer vein ? But when we have made the just exceptions, which we with pleasure acknowledge to be many, it must still be confessed, though not without pain, that the endless dissipation, and enervating luxury, of the times, have produced a languor of understanding, a feebleness of affection, and flatness of spirit, which diffuse a mortifying insipidity

over the intercourse of the sexes: they meet without attraction; they converse without delight; and they part without concern. I describe the common process. Men and women of enlightened understanding, and polite behaviour, are in all countries and ages as like one another, as they are different from the vulgar of whatever rank.

That the company of silly women must necessarily increase, amongst youth, the evil we complain of, that the company of artful women is always dangerous and often fatal, and that association with those females whose intellects and principles correspond not with their exterior allurements, has a tendency to effeminate and to corrupt, it were idle to deny, it were hurtful to conceal. We would carefully guard you on all these quarters; and were such persons only to be met with, it would be our duty, instead of recommending, to warn you against intimacy with the sex. But do not, my brothers, do not believe

those wanton buffoons, or those worthless satirists, who would labour, from whatever motive, to lessen your esteem for the loveliest part of God's workmanship, by confounding, in their indiscriminate, and therefore cruel, censures, the handmaids of Wisdom with the handmaids of Folly.

PART II.

JOHN, xi. 5.

NOW JESUS LOVED MARTHA, AND HER
SISTER—

IT is worthy of remark, that the most Divine Instructor ever known upon earth, scrupled not to commend, in the strongest terms, and on the gravest occasions, the upright and the penitent amongst his female as well as male attendants. The Son of God, my brethren, deemed it not beneath his own dignity, or unbeseeming the profession of a religious teacher in general, to descend into common life,

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and address all characters and classes, through whatever diversity of circumstances or manners, with a minuteness and a freedom, which could indeed offend none, but the malignant, the illiberal, or the prejudiced. Nor was He at a loss to discover, any more than slow to approve in the kindest style, laudable and excellent dispositions in numbers of the other sex. I go farther, and say, that this sex, so much depreciated in these days, he was pleased to honour with a particular share of his attention and zeal.

His approbation, it is true, was always regulated by a just distinction of characters; neither did he fail to reprehend, where it became necessary, his firmest adherents, or his dearest friends. The same voice, that celebrated the wisdom of Mary, reproved the anxiety of Martha. Our Saviour was well aware, that applause and admonition are equally the language of friendship, as occasion is given for either. He never was backward to bestow the first when merited,

and to bestow it openly, frankly, affectionately ; as, on the other hand, his regard for those that loved him was too enlightened, and too pure, to permit his withholding the last, when any part of their behaviour rendered it requisite. Yes, my fellow christians, our Master was alike superior to that littleness of soul which commends reluctantly, with cold reserve, or political caution, and to that servility or cowardice which remains silent when virtue and faithfulness call to speak out.

After such an example, shall any Minister of religion, of Christ's Religion, be afraid or ashamed to express, in the most public manner, his respect for the more deserving of the female sex ; to encourage by applauding their virtues, or, by admonishing them, to correct their faults ; to enter into the detail of human conduct in speaking to human beings, or to draw without disguise the picture of a dissipated and debauched age, whose reformation it is his duty to promote by all possible means, at

whatever hazard of ridicule from the satirical, of censure from the contracted, or of calumny and abuse from the false and the malevolent? Against the miserable, but unwearied, efforts of such minds, the proper armour is a good conscience, joined for the most part with a calm contempt.

As for ourselves, indeed, we do not think it requires much fortitude to confess our having felt an early predilection for Good and Amiable Women. It proceeded from an early observation of the modesty which always adorns their deportment, of the elegance and vivacity which often distinguish their conversation, and of that delightful interest which the tender affections, and attractive manners, found among the most valuable of the sex, are peculiarly adapted to create in hearts of the least feeling. Nor has our opinion in their favour, or our attachment to their society, been lessened, by longer experience, in any greater proportion than there is reason to apprehend the pleasing sensibilities, and

flattering ideas, of youth on most other subjects, will naturally be lowered in the progress of life.

It is certain, that all advantages are not to be secured together. If superior degrees of inward tranquillity and self-possession are gained, when inclination and fancy become more cool, the objects of the latter will seldom appear so captivating to the soul as they were wont. Though their intrinsic merit may not be at all abated, they will scarcely strike the intellectual eye with the same lively lustre.

It must also be acknowledged, that, as we advance through the world, wider views, more opportunities, and maturer judgments, with a variety of unexpected events and unimagined circumstances, often painful, sometimes deplorable, lead to mortifying discoveries concerning a number of characters in both sexes: neither can it be thought wonderful, if in the present condition of our nature we should

not find very many, who are capable of bearing a close acquaintance or severe inspection.

When awakened from our youthful dreams of unbounded confidence, and of admiration flaming to enthusiasm, what remains for us, but to be more moderate in our expectations, more reasonable in our regards, and to cultivate that spirit of mutual forbearance which is so becoming in imperfect beings, so necessary to our peace, and so noble a branch of christian virtue? But how seldom are these maxims observed !

Offended by frequent disappointment in persons as well as things, men are prone to conceive disgust at those about them, instead of laying the blame on their own too sanguine hopes ; and in the impatience of disapprobation, occasioned by particular instances of vice or folly, to exchange their former partiality for a less happy extreme, that of general suspicion and unlimited

fatire. In the mean time they forget to consider, that others are detecting frailties and failings in themselves, which, unless they meet with kinder allowance than they often make where their neighbours are concerned, must excite similar disaffection, and beget an asperity of reproach which they are ill able to support.

Mournful, alas! would be the situation of mortals, were even the best of them to be tried by the strict rules of unerring rectitude; were no allowance to be made for temptations and imbecilities, from which it does not appear that human resolution, or human vigilance, has ever yet proved an universal preservative. But are none of you, Gentlemen, disposed to exact from the other sex a degree of perfection, which you hold yourselves excused from attempting? I fear it is but too common for men, in the pride of their hearts, to pronounce women the Weaker Vessel, not in the favourable sense of St. Paul. But pride is always accompanied with injustice: for

at the same moment that they pique themselves on their own superiority, they demand from this weaker vessel a strength, of which they judge it unnecessary to set the example.

That Providence designed women for a state of dependance, and consequently of submission, I cannot doubt, when I consider their timidity of temper, their tenderness of make, the many comforts and even necessities of life which they are unable to procure without our aid, their evident want of our protection upon a thousand occasions, their incessant study, at every age, in every state, by every means, to engage our attention, and insure our regard. But if this be true, is it noble in us, is it generous, is it manly, to look upon them with a supercilious eye, or, because they are in our power, to exult in their debility? If to raise a fallen enemy be the part of a hero, what is it to triumph over a confiding friend, to insult those who throw themselves on our

patronage, or to return the coldness of neglect, where there are so many claims to compassion, observance, and affection ?

Did I find the softer sex abused only by the coarsest and lowest of ours, by men who approach to brutes or to barbarians, it were less astonishing. But what am I to think, when I frequently find men of education and politeness, elegant scholars, and pleasing companions,—when I find them too departing at once from the gentleness and elevation of humanity, and disgracing their accomplishments, by wantonly involving even the best women in their unbounded satire against the female race, and, as far as in them lies, sacrificing to wit and merriment the reputation of defenceless creatures, who are not present to vindicate themselves, and have not power to punish their traducers ? But the truth is, he who has not happened to witness such cases, will hardly believe what cruelties of this kind are often com-

mitted by those who join not principle to cultivation.

It is somewhat remarkable, that the greatest lampooners of the women have been often their greatest dupes. Dissatisfied with gratifications which their reason never could approve, they are willing to shift off the reproach on the partners of their folly, and take revenge on others for consequences which they should charge upon themselves. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me," said the first man, "she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Unhappy Adam! where was thy fairness, where was thy decency, in casting the load of blame, partly on thy companion, and partly on thy Creator; on that companion whom he gave to thy guardianship and direction; on that Creator, from whom thou hadst but a little while before received her with gratitude and transport?

Do we mean, by this, to excuse the first woman, or, by aught we have said or may say, to flatter any of her daughters? We do not. The language that would justify transgression, the praise that instead of cherishing merit would foster conceit, the incense that is offered to beauty or youth, to external advantages or superficial acquirements, instead of being kept sacred to the Divinity of Virtue, we detest and despise. At the same time we have no conception that the natural, easy, and reasonable expressions of well-deserved and well-directed approbation can ever be incompatible with prudence, or with piety; or yet that compassion “for the weak, and for them that are “out of the way,” can be justly condemned by the strictest casuistry. We appeal from unfeeling bigots, and savage detractors, to the Divine Philanthropist in our text: “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her Sister.” And elsewhere we learn, that as he justified and commended the Sister in the most explicit manner for her fixed and humble attention to his instructions, so,

when he blamed the ~~too~~ anxious, though not indevout Martha, he performed that less pleasing task with a meekness worthy of himself. Is there not something peculiarly mild, a certain sweetness of reproof, in the very repetition of her name? “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.”—I think I behold this good creature covered with amiable confusion, at a rebuke, from her Master and her Friend, thus tenderly conveyed. Her excessive hurry and solicitude, in preparing for the entertainment of her guests, not only produced some warmth and discontent on the subject of her excellent Sister, but threw her into a restless agitation of spirit, resembling the state of a person in a tumultuous crowd, where so many are pressing upon him, that he can scarcely stand his ground; for this, it has been observed, the original word seems to import: and by the same means she lost an important opportunity of religious improvement. How often does the soul suffer by the intrusion of little cares!

It is plain however that honest Martha, as well as happy Mary, was, notwithstanding a considerable diversity of disposition, sincerely pious and attached.

A Propensity to Devotion, and a Warmth of Affection, have in all ages, if I mistake not, been found most frequently among Women. Witness the spiritual assemblies, the domestic intercourses, the history and poetry of different nations, whether ancient or modern. Have not women been commonly remarked to constitute much the greater number of worshippers? Have not women been often particularly eminent for filial and parental duty? Do not the records of human actions through successive periods, and those representations of human characters which have been founded on them by the tragic and the epic Muse,—do not they abound with examples of transcendent piety and generosity in the female sex, of extraordinary sacrifices made by women, I say by Women, to the interests of Heaven, to the cause of

Truth, to the happiness of their Country, to virtuous love, to honest fame, to the finest and noblest feelings of the heart?

To style such piety Superstition, and such generosity Romance, is indeed customary with those who esteem it smartness to turn into ridicule whatever is most respectable or sacred. The Athenian Sage himself was held up as an object of laughter: but did he deserve it? Even the world's Deliverer was in contempt called "The friend of publicans and sinners:" but is he the less entitled to our love or veneration? Wherever I discern the image of his gentle and elevated virtues, shall I forbear to admire it, because it is mistaken by the prejudiced, or dishonoured by the prophane?

That many women have been superstitious, and many romantic, even to distraction, we readily acknowledge, though we do not think that examples of either remarkably abound in the present age.

But where is the wonder if particular minds, weak by nature, or enfeebled by disease, or depressed by misfortune, or, should none of these be the case, contracted by a narrow education, alarmed by the dismal representations of some well-meaning preachers and writers, or “ led captive by the sleight of men who lie in wait to deceive,” and take advantage of tender spirits and apprehensive imaginations ;—where, I say, is the wonder, if such minds become a prey to religious terror and despondence ; or if those amongst them, who escape so dreadful a situation, yet lose the enjoyment of life, by mistaking gloom for piety ? Have we not seen men as well as women often labouring under the same mistake, and sometimes driven to despair and madness from the same causes ?

I would likewise ask, Can it excite surprise, if passions constitutionally ardent, unrestrained by authority, unenlightened by instruction, encouraged by habitual idleness and fashionable amusements, in-

flamed and instigated by flatterers, companions, books, occasions, of the most dangerous kind, are frequently carried to an excess destructive of all sober thought and internal serenity, even when reputation and decorum are preserved? Instead of thinking it strange, that this should occur so often amidst such a combination of snares, I cannot for my part but admire that it is not yet more common. The swarms of foolish and of worthless novels, incessantly spawned by dull and by dissolute scribblers, and with unwearied industry disseminated from our Circulating Libraries, were alone sufficient to swallow up, amongst the young and gay, all sober reflection, every rational study, with every virtuous principle; and to introduce in their room impure ideas, extravagant desires, and notions of happiness alike fantastic and false. By the influence of those productions on unguarded readers the whole system of life seems converted into romance; and nothing is regarded as worth a thought, which does not promise to gratify inclination, to cherish vanity, or to lead that wild and restless ad-

venturer, Juvenile Fancy, through a fairy land of astonishment and rapture.

Of the hapless creatures that have lost their character, how small is the proportion to the whole sex! But while those wretched wanderers strike the eye of observation by the peculiar infelicity of their case, the numberless women who never deviated are overlooked and forgotten; just as a few strayed sheep engage the attention of the traveller, who stops not to contemplate the large flock from which they are parted.

When I consider the younger part of the female world as now placed in a state of society, where pleasure and show, with the wealth that procures them, are become the chief, almost the only objects; where those better sentiments that should counterwork their operation are derided by the profligate, and neglected by the thoughtless; where celibacy is in fashion amongst men of all ranks, and libertinism amongst

women of the highest; it appears to me, that the irreproachable behaviour still found in such numbers, under such circumstances, discovers a force of resolution, and a feeling of decency, which deserve no common praise. In this view, surely, it becomes the generality of our sex to bow with respect before the superior presence of female propriety and fortitude.

In relation to women of a different class, give me leave to ask, Who are usually the authors of their ruin and infamy? Who, but the very wretches that suspect and upbraid the sex on their account? Matchless effrontery! Not satisfied with casting the first stone at the poor offenders, whom they themselves have contributed to mislead, they presume to glance it on the innocent by-standers! And by what means are those unhappy beings I speak of most frequently undone? By what other, than an artful and unwearied application to their desire of pleasing the men? A desire which,

like the other kind affections implanted by Nature, would under just regulation produce the best effects, and which that female, who should profess herself not to feel, would deservedly incur the suspicion of falshood or ignorance, affectation or insensibility. Unprincipled as are the majority of our sex, and unguarded as are too many even amongst the virtuous of the other, it is indeed often unfortunate when this desire proves very strong.

Far be it from me, to defend the cause of those women, who have forfeited that virtue, without which they are lost to society, to character, to happiness. But with regard to the greater part of them, is it not some mitigation of their guilt, and should it not obtain some compassion for their frailty, that their natural sollicitude to engage the attention and tenderness of the men has been turned into a handle for their destruction? Their fond imaginations have been set on fire by obsequiousness, and courtship, and adulation, and promises, and protestations, and presents, and vows,

without end. And all the while, perhaps, they have been without a parent to protect, or a friend to warn them. Of those who have parents, and friends as they are called, how few are the happier for that circumstance! how many are much the more to be pitied! those very persons, God knows, being frequently so worthless, as to encourage, if not to instruct them in vice and impiety.

That women, who have gone astray, should sometimes run to excesses, beyond the ordinary limits of male transgression, may perhaps be accounted for from the vivacity peculiar to the sex; from a wish to escape, by the violence and rapidity of their career, that reflection which men have many more ways of eluding; and, may we not add, from that passion for attracting notice by some means or other, which, after bursting the bounds of duty and decorum, hopes to effect its purpose by singularity in wickedness, and audacity of manners? Is it not also possible,

I speak it with caution, that Providence, ever intent on extracting good from evil, may, by giving "them over to a reprobate mind," permit such flagrant indecency, in order to deter the innocent from a path which, once entered, might lure them on to the last extreme of depravation?

Much is said about Vanity in Women. And are you sure, my young men, that those who say it are always themselves remarkable for modesty? Have you never heard such censures from fops and fribbles, a race of creatures not to be surpassed in conceit by the silliest girl that ever issued from a foolish boarding-school? The illusions of self-love are often merely subjects of ridicule: but when human beings confidently reproach the characters of others with those very follies which are conspicuous in their own, and which, let it be observed, they are hourly labouring by their example, conversation, and encouragement, to propagate; we then smile, pity, despise, and condemn, at once.

To whatever cause the difference is owing, good-nature will forgive a female, who appears to be fond of her person or dress, much more readily than a man who betrays the same weakness. Perhaps, indeed, this indulgence to the other sex is at the bottom a compliment to our own: perhaps, Gentlemen, we are willing, on such occasions, to make more allowance for the imbecility of those who were formed to delight us, not so much by an emulation of intellects, as by external graces and decorations, united with the softer virtues of the heart, and the sprightlier charms of the fancy. Neither does it require any extraordinary candour to reflect, that female education is too often directly calculated to feed and flatter female vanity.

Is it not well known, that most girls are from their childhood told every day of beauty, and ornament, and the pains to be taken about both? Do they not manifestly discover, in most of the women with

whom they converse, a perpetual anxiety on those articles; and in many of the men, a perpetual proneness to admire and extol the sex, exactly in proportion to their outward attractions? Are not their very play-things so decked out, as often to inspire the love of show and embellishment, along with their earliest, and even their best impressions; those, I mean, that are connected with kind affection and tender care? And when they grow up to partake in the pleasures of company, to attend on public diversions, and to engage in fashionable reading, what do they generally find in all these, but eternal marks of attention to appearance and splendor? They cannot even walk the streets of a country town, without having their eyes caught by the exhibition of gaiety and finery in almost every window. As for the metropolis, what is it else but the general mart of all that can propagate admiration of an outside, or, if you will, one intire and enormous scene of enchantment, where Fashion, Opulence, and Ostentation, are

incessantly practising their witchcraft? From thence the incantation is every where diffused; and hardly any where are found parents, or teachers, possessed of talents and principles proper to oppose its influence. In reality, how few mothers or mistresses at present are either qualified, or solicitous, to form in the youth of their sex, a taste for the decent and the simple, and at the same time the elegant and the graceful, in looks, in attire, in air, in demeanour; and to imprint upon them a conviction, that all exterior recommendations should ever be regarded as subordinate to “the ornament of a meek and “quiet spirit,” of an improved and pious mind! When these things are considered, can you wonder, if many women appear fantastic, frivolous, vain?

After all, we pretend not to deny, that the love of dress, and an habitual study of personal attractions, are closely interwoven with the female character. That they are so, seems evident from the history

of all nations and ages, whether polished or barbarous. And from this very circumstance we conclude, that they are originally prompted by Nature. Nor have we any doubt that, under right direction and within due bounds, they are adapted to answer important purposes in society, by contributing to engage the notice and regard of men; by employing the powers of industry, of imagination, and of taste; by softening the cares, and enlivening the toils, appointed for the tender sex; and by supplying many amusements suited to the state of humanity at large, as a scene of labour, frailty, and suffering.

Like other tendencies, indeed, they may now and then give way to such as chance to be stronger. Disgust at the world, austere systems of religious mortification, vehement pursuits of different kinds, and sometimes perhaps a high strain of philosophic refinement, may render a few females much less solicitous about the

decent arts of decoration, and the honest allurements of a pleasing appearance. But are they, on that account, entitled to much more esteem? Those men who think naturally, will scarce allow it. In the company of young women, we are by no means angry if they should take some pains to recommend themselves by an agreeable outside.

I said, Some pains : for, if their endeavours this way are too strong, too anxious, or too apparent; if they are at great expence of time, or money, or attention, in what relates to their exterior; if ornaments of a higher order, and the more valuable concerns of life, are neglected for it, or but slightly regarded; they will probably miss their aim with the more discerning part of our sex. The coquet, the flutterer, the fine lady, may sometimes indeed divert them for an hour, but will hardly excite sincere or permanent complacence, the respect and attachment of the soul.

But do not sensible, do not estimable women too frequently betray a passion for the mode, and an ambition of being admired on the score of external qualities, which we only excuse in the fools of the sex, or in girls of fifteen? It cannot be dissembled: it is much to be regretted. What pity but these women could be persuaded to cultivate a more lively sense of religion, and a nobler spirit of liberality! They would then rise above such weakness: they would then experience an elevation and a joy of the best kind, in sacrificing the folly and parade of life to intellectual pursuits, and charitable deeds: and let me tell them, they would then stand several degrees higher in the opinion of the worthiest men. How often they now suffer in that opinion, they seem not to be duly aware.

There are not perhaps upon earth many objects of more dignity or attraction than that female, who, though endowed with beauty, and skilful in dress, yet discovers

nothing conceited on either score, no conscious attention to herself when taken notice of for either; but, while she is too sincere to disavow any advantage she has received from Nature or education, behaves with composure, ease, and courtesy, nor ever forgets, that such qualities, with virtue and piety, knowledge and sense, are alone of solid value.

But peradventure it will be asked, Do not many women betray upon other points an intoxication of Vanity, which no candour will be able to pardon? Are there not many, for example, possessed with a notion, that almost every man is in love with them, who seems pleased with their sentiments, or flattered by their smiles, or disposed to say obliging things in their company, or perhaps to do good-natured ones without a single profession of regard? It is shamefully true. Indelicate and despicable creatures! We blush on your account; nor will we offer the least apology for so extravagant

a conceit, for a delusion so very gross. Had you either prudence, or penetration, or becoming modesty, you would beware of construing into a serious passion even a thousand complimentary speeches, or yet a thousand warm protestations of I know not what esteem, attachment, and zeal, or indeed any possible assiduities, or appearances of tenderness, where the matter goes no farther; and would rely ultimately on no evidence of settled affection, but an explicit declaration, and a direct address. Not that I would utter, God forbid I should, a word in excuse for those of our sex, that habitually or deliberately indulge themselves in a behaviour, which they cannot be long ignorant is too apt to be dangerously mistaken by young women. Gracious Heaven, that any one should thus play with the peace and happiness of the very persons, whom manhood and generosity ought to protect! Little will it avail to plead, that you had no intention, when the mischief is done, when a fond unguarded heart is inveigled, when a foun-

tain of bitterness, that may never cease to flow, is opened in a breast, perhaps in more than one breast, whose chief, or it may be whose only, fault was believing you to be in earnest. Learn, ye credulous fair! oh learn to trust your heart with no man who does not tell you plainly that he has given you his, with a resolution to give you his hand too, as soon as his situation shall permit.

With respect to those selfish and forward females, who catch with eagerness at the least semblance of regard on the part of some male acquaintance, as a pretext for claiming the matrimonial connexion, we cannot help saying, that we abhor alike their meanness and their impudence; that they trespass on all the rules of decent reserve, and maiden dignity; and that they often repress, in the minds of discreet men who know them, many pleasing propensities towards better women, lest these also should be found mercenary and base.

If a wish to possess the heart of some worthy man, co-operating with the partiality which most persons have for themselves, shall induce a woman to conclude too hastily, that such a man is attached to her; it will be decent at least to conceal a persuasion, which women of prudence and delicacy will ever be slow to entertain. To entertain it rashly, we have seen, is always wrong, and frequently pernicious. We now subjoin, that to declare it bluntly is both unwise and contemptible. But then we should remember, that the same behaviour is chargeable on many men. I am particularly concerned for women of sentiment, when I consider how often their good-breeding is put to the trial in the presence of coxcombs, whom their good sense cannot but despise; lest common civility should, with such presumptuous fools, pass for fondness. Surely, Gentlemen, one of the last things a man of sense and modesty will suspect is, that a woman is enamoured of him.

Such suspicions indeed properly belong to fribbles, witlings, and libertines. With what triumph have we heard them repeat, in the words of the poet, that “Every woman “is at heart a Rake!” In this uncharitable system they think themselves sufficiently supported, by the conduct of those females who have, from a state of sobriety, whether real or affected, fallen into known and scandalous deviations; as if there were in truth no more virtue among the rest, how dextrously soever they may save appearances.

That the sex in general are Artful, the men I speak of have been at much pains to propagate; and this opinion has, I know not how, gained ground amongst numbers from whom we might expect more fairness and impartiality. That women of little worth, and low capacity, are often cunning; and that individuals, possessed of better talents, often degrade and pervert them to the concealed pursuit of power, of lucre, or of mischief, we are far from de-

nying. Nor is it to be disguised, that too many women of elegance and sense have submitted to a piece of deceit, on which the very best friends of the sex must ever reflect with grief and amazement; I mean, Sirs, that of vowing at the altar of God unceasing love and honour to men, for whom it is not possible that sense or elegance should entertain either sincere affection or esteem; to men so flagrantly profligate, so palpably insignificant, or so exceedingly disagreeable, that all the world must be convinced such sacrifices of understanding, taste, ingenuity, and the pleasures connected with the heart, could only be made to the demon of Covetousness, the idol of Rank, or the passion for Splendor. When they are incited by indigence or the dread of it, in persons especially who were well born and delicately bred, it is a piteous case, and will be considered accordingly at the bar of Humanity. The motives, on which so inauspicious a connexion was formed, will be forgiven at that bar to

women under those circumstances, who afterwards perform their duty as well as they are able. But what excuse or mitigation shall be found, where there was no actual distress, no painful dependance ; where perhaps, on the contrary, there was an easy, or even an affluent fortune? If such legal prostitution is usually productive of lasting remorse and misery, is the result wonderful, or the punishment unjust?

Speaking in general, it appears to me, that if superior artifice implies superior praise, the latter is fairly due to Men. Their plots and stratagems are laid much deeper, and executed with much more boldness, regularity, and vigour ; as they commonly turn upon objects of greater consequence, and are often prompted by a keener rancour, or a more ardent impetuosity. To punish neglect, to blast a rival, to take revenge on infidelity in a lover or a husband, has indeed not seldom employed, and with terrible efficacy, the

art of a disappointed, jealous, and vindictive woman. But the schemes of those females that are fond of scheming from littleness of soul, or a notion of being wondrous cunning, refer for the most part to—what? Why, truly, to the obtaining of some small pecuniary advantage, or petty ornament, or new piece of dress, or favourite amusement, or additional importance; to lessen the figure, lower the reputation, or obstruct the success, of any particular person or persons of their own sex, whom they behold with an invidious eye, or in fine to impose on the men for their own purposes. But where the men are not very simple, or very fond, or intoxicated by youthful passions, they will commonly without much difficulty see through the cobwebs that are spread to catch them. And as to the other childish tricks daily played by such women, surely a good-natured man will view them with a mixture of mirth, pity, and indifference, rather than with warm indignation.

Mean while, what shall we think of the craft, the duplicity, the falsehood, the treachery, the dark and deep underminings, hourly practised by multitudes of our sex to gain their ends amongst the other; or to gratify their avarice, ambition, resentment, or envy? Let Observation, let History answer the question, by pointing to the numberless train of evils produced by such causes, wherever wealth, luxury, and false refinement, have rendered men artificial.

The worthiest characters in our sex, it may be observed, are marked generally by an openness, and always by a probity, that reflects the greatest credit on their hearts, and, I add, on their understandings also. Yes, my beloved and honoured auditors, after all that a late well-known master, patron, and teacher, of Diffimulation has advanced to the contrary, I do not hesitate to pronounce Diffimulation, and indeed the whole family of Cunning, by whatever name dignified, im-

potent and miserable apes of manly Ability and genuine Wisdom. I subjoin, that men of integrity and sentiment display a nobleness, which fails not sooner or later to strike and persuade beyond all the paltry arts in the world ; and I call the best and greatest spirits of every age to witness, that such men are placed upon an eminence, from which they may look down, with superlative scorn, on the whole inglorious race of Knaves, Liars, and Dissemblers.

PART III.

JOHN, xi. 5.

NOW JESUS LOVED MARTHA, AND HER
SISTER—

THE mighty influence which human beings have upon the character and happiness of one another, and the minute casualties by which they are often associated, cannot but appear, to reflecting minds, among the most mysterious arrangements of Providence. The very persons, who might have probably been wise and blessed, had they fallen into proper company, are frequently cor-

rupted and undone, by insensibly forming imprudent connexions : and, although I sincerely believe, that some of the sweetest pleasures, which the soul can taste, must arise from the society of Women, yet by some strange infatuation men often convert it into a source of misery. Either they expect too much, and being necessarily disappointed are chagrined and soured ; or else, from unreasonable and unworthy prejudices against a sex, whom the Almighty created for their companions and their comforters, they are precluded from a felicity which no other object in this world can equally supply.

Where—I had almost enquired, where is the singular mortal, that can keep the balance even ? Is it not, with a very few exceptions, abuse on the one side, or adulation upon the other ? We would willingly recommend the just medium, and warn you, my younger brethren in particular, against either extreme. That of disparaging the sex seems, as I before hinted,

the mode at present. Many of the particulars I have already considered. Amongst those which I have not, we may reckon the charge of Female Scandal, which we have heard advanced, reiterated, and dwelt upon with so much exultation.

That female scandal is circulated very freely amongst vulgar and uninstructed women, without generous feelings or the restraints of religion, we as freely confess. But can it surprise any who reflect, that those, who want in themselves a fund of worth or intelligence, should not be much inclined to discover or acknowledge it in others, or to search for matter of rational and harmless entertainment, when the joy of finding fault, so natural to the uncorrected malignity of illiberal minds, can be obtained without labour from the conjectures of idleness, the rumours of misrepresentation, and the imperfections of humanity?

The narrow sphere to which most females are confined, and their frequent communication with one another in the absence of men, joined to the unamiable competitions which must often take place where there is little enlargement or benevolence, will too readily excite such persons to amuse themselves at the expence of others.

But what is all this to those that are better taught, and have better affections, whose hearts stream with tenderness, whose imaginations sparkle with vivacity, and whose intellects are improved by useful reading and polite conversation? Amongst this class of women, it is but justice to declare, we have not found the malicious sneers, or the impertinent tattle, so commonly imputed to the sex at large. Whether the same thing can be always said even of those men, from whose sense and breeding it might be justly hoped, let my male hearers themselves determine.

Of this I am sure, that our divine Master and Model expressed himself with peculiar gentleness, where women were concerned. We have before remarked the beautiful manner in which he reproved the over-solicitous Martha, as well as praised her sweetly-pensive Sister. It is true indeed, that, when upon a particular occasion his Mother presumed to direct him in the exercise of his miraculous power, he said to her, not only with an air of reprehension as the case required, but with a plainness of language, which, considering especially to whom he spoke, is apt to hurt a modern ear—"Woman, what have I
 "to do with thee," that thou shouldst take upon thee to tell me how and when my miracles are to be wrought? But then it should be observed, that though it is a mode of expression not admitted amongst us, to call a person, Woman, when we are speaking to her, if she be one whom we think entitled to any respect, yet some of the politest authors of antiquity make the most accomplished, and the best bred,

princes use it in addressing themselves to Ladies of the highest rank: and even servants too are represented as adopting the same style when they spoke to their Mistresses. Such was the simplicity of ancient days!—But when the Woman of Canaan applied to our Saviour, with the most respectful and affectionate earnestness, in behalf of her much-afflicted daughter, did he not, besides at first seeming to neglect her petition, and then for some time to refuse it with coldness if not aversion, proceed, as though all this were not discouraging enough, to embitter his refusal with a phrase apparently harsh and humiliating in the extreme? Gracious Redeemer! What an aspect dost thou here assume! Is this agreeable to thy usual tenderness? Is this like the Physician and the Friend of human nature?—Mark the sequel. Our honest petitioner, inspired by her piety and her distress, eloquent and irresistible from the feelings of a mother's bosom, at once turns with a happy dexterity on our Saviour's words, and extracts

arguments from the very language of unkindness. “Against hope she believes in hope.” She conquers: she triumphs. A treatment so strange in appearance, on the part of Jesus, was not intended to overwhelm this worthy creature’s heart, but to illustrate by trying her faith; and to furnish himself with an opportunity of indulging his God-like benevolence, by the warmest applause, and the amplest compliance.—“O Woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee, even as thou wilt:” “and her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

It might be added, that when female penitents were censured without mercy by sanctimonious pretenders, our Saviour omitted not to plead their cause; and that his reproofs, even to the greatest sinners of the sex, were tempered with mildness; though in rebuking the hypocritical and hard-hearted of ours, he uses a style of the most awful severity. No, my brothers, noble minds cannot endure the

idea of insolence to the weak and the wretched; least of all, when it skulks under the mask of religion.

But to go on with our subject; amongst the imputations against the women, we must not forget to take notice of one, that might indeed be dispised, did it not sometimes involve individuals of much merit in other respects, and refer to a species of pride irreconcilable with the lovely meekness and modest pliancy which ought always to characterize the sex, and the want of which no talents, no allurements, can ever sufficiently compensate. I mean the Affectation of a Superior Understanding.

Ignorant people, and enthusiastic lovers, may be delighted with the harangues and decisions of those women whom they admire as very handsome, or very wise; but men of a different stamp, and a cooler temper, will take the liberty to be of another opinion. Were it right for you, my

female friends, to pique yourselves on any thing, believe me it should only be on a gentle disposition, and a complacent deportment, on domestic qualities, and useful accomplishments. By these you will always be sure to please the best judges, and in the greatest numbers.

That many of you are endowed with admirable capacities, and that you have improved them with diligence and success, we do not barely acknowledge; we are ready to maintain and prove it, before the whole school of Chesterfield's disciples. When I mention him on this occasion, I really am at a loss to conceive, how he could form so mean an opinion of female understanding; for, certainly, amongst the many women of condition in different countries, to whose company he had always ready access, he must have met with a number respectable for their mental powers and acquisitions. We, whose opportunities of this kind have been comparatively few, can yet affirm without flat-

tery, that we have found, in some ladies of fashion, not only much brilliancy of fancy, but equal solidity of judgement and acuteness of penetration. To whatever follies such persons may be exposed, from the prevalence of luxury and the parade of rank, it must still be allowed, that their education is usually conducted on a larger scale, and with more liberal views, than that of the lower classes; as they have commonly the advantage also of more elegant and instructive conversation. Neither is it probable that, in the society of a man like Chesterfield, women of wit and knowledge would be much disposed to suppress their attainments.

But you, my sisters, will not be forward to exhibit yours, if you would be advised by one who is better affected to your interest and reputation. Whether, as his Lordship contends, your sex in general are incapable of arguing with closeness and precision; whether, if they are, as we confess ourselves at times ready

to think is the case with the majority, the defect be owing to their frame, or their culture; or whether in reality it be a defect, considering their state and destination, I will not nicely enquire. I am certain, that in early comprehension, natural taste, sprightly imagination, quick discernment of characters, and wonderful address in suiting themselves to each, they frequently excel; nor are they seldom adorned with a considerable portion of knowledge and literature, when favoured by their genius and situation.

As to the love of dispute in either sex, it is never, I apprehend, a very pleasing quality. I am sure, it does not lead to the best style of conversation. They who indulge it, rarely convince, and not often delight any but themselves. None will say, it mends the temper, or improves the heart: and all must acknowledge, that it frequently disgusts and inflames. In a brisk youth inured to it at college, or a flippant girl accustomed to talk away amongst her companions at school, it may

easily be tolerated now and then, though commonly accompanied with a sufficient quantity of pertness and petulance. Nor is it worth while, to be offended at the peremptory prate of a silly woman, who fancies she cannot be mistaken, provided at least her noise may be soon escaped. But it is not quite so easy to avoid being seriously displeased, when persons of better intellects, and higher breeding in other articles, seem full of their own sense, fond of debating on all occasions, and forward to pronounce on all subjects, with a confidence which we do not very readily excuse even in the greatest masters. The greatest masters, indeed, are generally the least assuming. Modesty, it has been often remarked, is the usual attendant of exalted merit; and a bolder tone is assumed by superior spirits, only where insolence provokes, or necessity demands.

Ah, my female friends, did you in particular, did You but know, how deeply the male heart is enchanted with those

women, whose conversation presents the picture of simplicity and grace, of ease and politeness, in a groupe; the spirit of whose conversation is a compound of sprightliness, sense, and modesty; who seldom dispute, and never wrangle; who listen with attention to the opinions of others, and deliver their own with diffidence, more desirous of receiving than of giving conviction, more ambitious to please than to conquer! Such, believe me, are sure of conquering in the noblest sense.

Paint to yourselves, by way of contrast, a woman who talks loud, contradicts bluntly, looks fullen, contests pertinaciously, and instead of yielding challenges submission. How different a figure! How forbidding an object! Feminality is gone: Nature is transformed: whatever makes the male character most rough, and turbulent, is taken up by a creature, that was designed to tranquillize and smooth it. In place of a "charmer, charming never so wisely," what do we behold? A clamorous, ob-

stinate, contentious being, universally disgustful and odious ; fit only to be chased from the haunts of humanity, those peaceful haunts which it seeks to disturb—Merciful Heaven ! shelter us from its violence, in the blessed sanctuary of domestic love and joy, or in the sweet harmonious choir of friendship.

How have we pitied a man of sense and spirit, who has had the infelicity of being connected for life with a self-sufficient and obstreperous woman ! A pusillanimous creature, or a doating fool, may submit to her humours with little difficulty. But the other is shocked to the soul : astonishment and indignation seize him by turns : he is wounded in his tenderest sensibilities, and wrung with disappointment where he was interested most. He sought a partner, and found a plague : he expected a soft, affectionate, sympathizing friend, and met with a bosom foe. The beauty of an Angel, the wealth of the Indies, were such a woman mistress of them,

would both be insufficient, in his eyes, to atone for her behaviour. But, O my brothers, how delightfully is the heart vanquished and captivated, when an unpretending female appears before it, with Reason, Fancy, and Virtue in her train, and discovers, in her family and amongst her friends, all the loveliness of smiles and sympathies, of placid address, and gentle insinuation!

But may there not be occasions, where wisdom and worth, in women as in men, are called upon to assert themselves, with a dignity that shall repress the forward, and over-awe the insolent? Certainly: and to give such proceeding the name of pride were unjust. But, on the other hand, to mistake the demands of pride, which are boundless, for that dignity which seldom wishes to stand forth, is ignorant. It is yet more so, to imagine, that the male heart can either be gained by arrogance, or preserved by opposition.

The very best men are so made, as to be soothed by ready compliance, and chilled by habitual stubbornness, in women. To female capacity they will frankly allow all the respect it can deserve, if that respect be not confidently claimed. To female excellence they will resign the empire of the breast with pleasure. But remember, young women; such excellence forever precludes the affectation of power, will rarely appear to exert it, and will generally prevail by submitting.

Perhaps, Gentlemen, one reason why the most accomplished of our sex are fond of conversing with the most agreeable of the other, is because with them they are relieved from that rivalry of genius, and those contrarieties of opinion, which too often impair, not to say poison, the enjoyments of male society. Sentiment, imagination, variety, complacence, and all the pretty playfulness of minds that only wish to please and to be pleased, fill up, in the former case, those intervals of leisure that

succeed the fatigue and anxiety of business, the abstraction of study, or the straining of the faculties on whatever account. Surely, my brothers, they do not much consult either easy or elegant gratification, who prefer, to this kind of entertainment, the low pernicious company of prostitutes, or the noisy and intemperate intercourse of rakes.

When men of debauched principles appear happy, on the retiring of cultivated and virtuous women from table or elsewhere, they might be asked, What do you gain by it? Does the conversation become either livelier, or more refined? Or will you say, that your behaviour in general takes a better cast? You will scarcely say, that it is improved in politeness. But it is improved in freedom—O yes; the cruel restraints of decency are removed: you are now at liberty to burst forth into clamour, oaths, obscenity, prophaneness, defamation of the sex, and—if you are so disposed, to get drunk into the bargain.

Glorious privileges! Worthy, no doubt, to be highly prized by reasonable beings, by persons of education, and by gentlemen.

To speak seriously; Is a sensible and manly youth desirous of passing his leisure hours in a species of pleasure equally sociable and innocent; of acquiring the most proper demeanour, with the genteelest, and at the same time the easiest, turn of thought and expression, as well as right habits of the best kind? Instead of sauntering in coffee-houses, running to taverns, or rambling after loose women and giddy girls, let him associate with a few of both sexes, who join good breeding, and liberal sentiments, to purity of mind and manners. Of empty and effeminate boys, it can scarcely be expected, that they will put any value on such society. It may likewise be observed, that if the company of women only is sought, the deportment will be in danger of sinking into too much softness, as it will be apt to roughen into the rude, the boisterous, or the awkward, if that of men is habitually

preferred. Elegance and spirit united form the just temperament, which is produced by both. When a virtue at once mild and masculine is added, what can be figured more completely estimable?

It must be acknowledged, that the company of women entitled to respect, for their sense and worth, requires more attentions, and a stricter regard to the rules of breeding, than are commonly thought necessary in the presence of men; and this necessity is represented, by libertines, as one of those confinements that are not to be long or often endured by a youth of spirit. Now, amongst this tribe, a Youth of Spirit is only a finer name for a young man who determines to gratify his passions without controul, and admires the documents of those who have set him the example. What ensues? Impatient of the restraint which female delicacy would lay upon him, he hies away to some of those lost creatures, who like the great tempter, “ go about seeking whom they “ may devour.” If the consequence

should be irretrievable ruin, as God knows how often it is, he may date that ruin from the period when he began to grow weary of associating with his virtuous relations, and other deserving persons, of the female sex.

Think of the infatuated youths, who, in rapid and terrible succession, fall sacrifices to the violated laws of their country. How common is it for them to confess, at the tree of ignominy, that they were first led astray by bad women! Of the men you have formerly known, who did not die in disgrace, but went out of life with what the world calls a fair reputation, have you reason to believe, that there are none now, in anguish of soul, tracing back their final destruction to an early acquaintance with bad women?—That, in the future state, many virtuous men will, with everlasting joy and gratitude, ascribe, under God, their confirmation and progress in virtue, chiefly to their having been much conversant with female worth, I have no doubt.

My dear brothers, if ye “knew the
 “gift of God,” how highly would you
 prize whatever restraint tended to keep
 you from the paths of the Destroyer ! But
 the truth is, that, in the society I recom-
 mend, a young man, who does not wish
 to go astray, will feel himself under no
 fetter; will, on the contrary, find an easy
 scope for the indulgence of his imagina-
 tion, and of his heart, on every proper
 subject; and will learn genuine courtesy
 without labour or study. Amiable wo-
 men of genteel education are, indeed, be-
 yond comparison, the best mistresses of this
 science, for two reasons. In the first
 place, they best understand it; having
 from Nature a peculiar aptitude to please,
 with a wonderful facility in adapting them-
 selves to the tempers of others, and from
 Culture a ready acquaintance, which they
 soon acquire, with such forms of po-
 liteness as, without the aid of insincerity,
 give an elegance and a heightening to the
 native emanations of a good mind. In
 the next place, they teach it without ap-

pearing to teach it, by a secret power over the conceptions of their scholars ; who, naturally ambitious of approving themselves to such agreeable tutoresses, learn it from them insensibly, and yet effectually ; as people in general catch the sentiments and manners of those they esteem.

Who indeed, but brutes, could behave with wilful or deliberate rudeness before persons, whose character, whose conversation, whose very air, is calculated to impress respect ? Into such company, it may be presumed, the ferocious, the blustering, the coarse, the overbearing, or the noisy, will not often be disposed to intrude. There, alas ! they would find little pleasure. But, should they be there by accident, is it not possible some of them might be subdued, and transformed into a happier turn and better deportment ? Is it not reasonable to hope, that in this school the conceit of youth might be taught modesty ; the pedantry of the college exchanged for the ease of the entertaining

companion, and the urbanity of the accomplished gentleman; the stiffness and acrimony of the disputant tempered and moulded into a pleasing deference; the practice of yielding and obliging might beget a promptness to yield and oblige; the observance of decency improve into the love of goodness; or, to express the whole in a few words, every rougher passion and ungracious habit vanish away, as the furliness of winter disappears before the genial influence of the spring.

But, to experience such desirable effects, the society under consideration must be cultivated with steadiness and relish; not so, you may be sure, as to neglect other sources of improvement; but, I repeat it, with steadiness and relish; two things, indeed, very closely connected; and, I add, from earliest youth, before—what? Hear me, O hear me, and receive instruction—before the soul is poisoned with Sensuality, that most dangerous, most destructive, most epidemical of all disorders, from which I fear she rarely recovers.

Amongst those men that were early infected with the love of sensual pleasure, we have known individuals, who, in the conversation of virtuous and sentimental women, were visibly embarrassed, awkward, and constrained, like clowns in the presence of their superiors. Unaccustomed to such a situation, and conscious of that meanness which Vice must inwardly feel before the dignity of her Rival, they seemed to be out of their element, restless and unhappy, till they returned to more congenial associates, with whom they might give loose to all the licentiousness of their ideas and appetites.

Trust me, Sirs; chaste society is never thoroughly agreeable even to the politest libertines, whatever disguise they may wear, or whatever ease they may assume. Such society silently reproaches their crimes, and reminds them of those innocent delightful days which they once knew, and can now only recollect with a sigh. Happy the youth, that has no reflection of this kind

to chill the ardour of his honest sensibilities, or damp the harmless gaiety of his soul, among the worthiest people of either sex. Ah, my young friend, what felicity would you forego, what misery would you incur, should you ever be guilty of aught that might incite you secretly to hate, or dread, the presence of Virtue!

Do you love your health, your honour, your quiet, your reputation, your most valuable connexions, your highest interests on earth, or in Heaven? Be persuaded to take the counsel of a friend.—What is it? —If at any time passion or example, courtezans or debauchees, should attempt to corrupt you; instead of parleying, or deliberating, or even lingering to dispute, fly to the best and most improved woman of your acquaintance. In her company you will be safe, as in a “City of Refuge:” by her approbation you will be confirmed in those principles, and that conduct, which only can insure it: in conversing with her, your fancy will be amused, your under-

standing exercised, and your heart nourished: every improper idea will give place to better sentiments: every wrong bias will be counteracted:—what shall I say more? Virtue arrayed by the Graces, attended by the Smiles, and beheld in the person of such a woman, will look so supremely engaging, that the low arts, and unhallowed labours, of profligates and harlots to beguile you, must appear in your eye contemptible and hateful. Who, that has been accustomed to a palace, would quit it for a sty? Who, that has contracted a taste for whatever is excellent in poetry, or painting, would descend to take pleasure in a wretched dauber, or a common versifier? Who, that is smitten with “the beauty of holiness,” can look with delight on the loathsomeness of sin? Is the difference less striking, or will the contrast be less strongly felt by an ingenuous youth, between a worthy and sensible person of the other sex, and the victims of Infamy in either?

Let monks and misanthropes pretend to what they will ; the soul of man will seldom be long satisfied without the entertainment of female conversation. It was so formed by the unerring Creator ; nor perhaps will any thing, next to “ the wisdom that is from above,” guard it more powerfully against the sorcery of Vice, than the near and frequent view of Female Excellence.

If we might be permitted to quote our own observation, as any kind of evidence on this point ; it is certain, we have ever found those the most honourable, moral, and conscientious men, who had the greatest regard for women of reputation and talents. May we not venture to add, that genuine Piety, the piety of sentiment and affection, the piety which governs life, is, as far as our sex are concerned, to be met with most commonly among such men ?

The same depravity, indeed, that doubts the existence of virtue in female nature,

is often attended with a strange inclination to dispute the truth of Religion itself; as, on the other hand, he, who preserves that purity which loves and cherishes its resemblance in the pure, will be under no temptation to question the being, attributes, or claims, of the great Architype of all perfection. Have you ever known an instance, in which the man who became disaffected to modest women appeared to maintain any steady veneration for his Maker? As to the elevated joys which the good are taught to expect hereafter; I declare, for my own part, I never knew an individual who laughed at the notion of female virtue, that seemed to show, upon any occasion, the smallest solicitude to secure them, if indeed he believed a word of the matter. Account for this coincidence as you please; the fact I take the liberty to affirm.

I am sufficiently aware, that such men will affect to despise much of what has been now advanced on the subject of both sexes, as the language partly of ignorance,

partly of enthusiasm, and partly of what they are prone to call Want of Liberality. But on examining my most secret sensations, I feel that I can return their pretended contempt with real pity; convinced by a thousand proofs, that they are truly objects of the last, while they know from a thousand experiments, that the first is only a mask, to conceal, if possible, the inquietude of conscious guilt and folly.

To conclude; after all we have said respecting the Advantage to be derived by Young Men from the Society of Virtuous Women, much must be left to your own reflections. Represent to yourselves a youth of good sense, and good dispositions, dedicating a considerable share of his social hours to the conversation of a few females, who were chaste but not severe, frank but not indelicate, good-natured but with proper dignity, serious and lively by turns, polite and sincere at the same time, elegant without vanity, knowing without pride, and pious without ostentation: you,

my brothers, can better imagine than I can describe, the improvements which he must necessarily receive from such communications.

When I spoke of a Few Females, I did not think only of the young. Those men who should deny attractive qualities to women advanced or advancing in life, and avoid their company on that account, would betray a bad understanding and a worse taste. Whatever they may think of the assertion, nothing can be more true, than that many, very many, of the most accomplished and most agreeable companions, are to be found among such of the other sex, as have outlived the allurements of youth, with the little conceits, affectations, and follies, to which it is subject, and have matured, by recollection and experience, the best acquisitions of their early days. Perhaps, indeed, one of the surest marks of sobriety, and intelligence, is having a pleasure in the conversation of age.

Blessed are those of both sexes, who, by the sweetest symphony of minds and hearts attainable in this world, together with the daily practice of all the Christian Virtues, are preparing for the immortal concert of the sons and daughters of God. Take care, beloved and honoured, we call upon you in God's name to take care, lest any of you should, by a contrary course, expose yourselves to the infamy and horror of an everlasting exclusion from that divine assembly. Save me, almighty Father, save this people, save the youth of this generation, from a doom so dreadful; and grant of thine infinite mercy, through our only Mediator, that the intercourses of time may lay a foundation for the triumphs of eternity. Amen.

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